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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at broad trends in education of the gifted and identifies elements that states should review and reconsider in terms of the current climate for educational reform. The 1972 Marland report is contrasted with the 1993 report of the U.S. Department of Education titled "National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent;" Marland's exclusive focus on the education of the gifted and talented versus the later report's emphasis on excellence for all students is noted. This paper then identifies the following specific areas for state policy review, based on a review of documents from 49 states: (1) philosophy and rationale; (2) mandated services; (3) definitions of the gifted; (4) identification procedures; (5) programs for the gifted; and (6) differentiated curriculum and instruction. States are urged to accept the challenge offered by the "National Excellence" Report, reevaluate their policies, and consider changes recommended in this paper. (DB)

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Transforming Policy to Enhance Educational Services for the Gifted

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Recently, the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented published our study titled "State Policies Regarding Education of the Gifted as Reflected in Legislation and Regulation" (Passow & Rudnitski, 1993). The study was based on responses from 49 of the 50 states that provided documents--legislation, regulations, rules, handbooks, and resource materials--all of which made explicit or implicit policy statements. These were supplemented by reports of two surveys, one by the Council of State Directors of Programs for the Gifted (1991) and the other by Coleman & Gallagher (1992).

We concluded our study by observing that:

> In many ways, education for the gifted has come a long way since pre-Marland days. The fact that all 50 states have formulated policies in the form of legislation, regulations, rules, or guidelines that support education for the gifted and talented represents a very significant achievement, a consequence of vigorous and persistent efforts on the part of many advocates--parents, educators, politicians, and others. Having attained this goal, the time is now right for a reexamination of existing policies, taking into account

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> research, experience, and developments in education, psychology, organization, and related fields; the ongoing school reform and restructuring efforts; the changing context for society and schooling that is occurring; the distinctive state-local relationships by which the diverse mandates and the regulations permitting discretionary programs are implemented differently; and the consequences of the ways local school districts have implemented state policies (p.xv).

As we were completing our study, the Department of Education issued its first report dealing with the gifted since the 1972 Marland Report. Titled National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent (U.S. Department of Education, 1993), the DE Report "describes the 'quiet crisis' that continues in how we educate top students. Youngsters with gifts and talents that range from mathematical to musical are still not challenged to work to their full potential" (p. iii). National Excellence attributed this crisis to such pervasive problems as anti-intellectualism in American culture and a general lack of high standards, aiming "for academic adequacy, not academic excellence" (p. 1).

There are a number of differences between the Marland and the National Excellence reports. One significant difference is that Marland focused exclusively on the education of the gifted and talented, linking the two terms into one, urging schools to create learning opportunities that went beyond those normally provided by the school. National Excellence, on the other hand, puts the education of the gifted into the context of general education or the education of all students. Secretary of Education Riley observes in his foreword:

> Americans can celebrate improvements over the past two decades in how we educate gifted and talented students. The

public is more aware that these students have special needs that are seldom met. The number of programs for gifted and talented youngsters has grown substantially. Many states have enacted legislation encouraging local school districts to provide special opportunities for high-achieving and talented students. And , most significantly, model programs for gifted and talented students have challenged educators to improve curriculum and teaching strategies and encouraged them to raise expectations for <u>all</u> students (p. iii).

The DE Report notes that, although attention is paid sporadically to the needs of the gifted, most are underchallenged, spending time in school working below their capabilities, in settings where teachers make few demands on and few provisions for able students. In presenting its "vision for excellent schools" the report asserts that the "schools we need in the future must provide a richer curriculum for all students, realize each student's potential, and develop outstanding talent" (p. 29). Its six major recommendations deal with:

1. Establishing performance standards in the core subjects that challenge students to perform at the highest levels.

2. Establishing comprehensive and advanced learning opportunities that meet the needs of children with outstanding talents in every school.

3. Ensuring that all children, especially the economically disadvantaged and minority children, have access to early childhood education opportunities that develop their potential.

4. Increasing opportunities for economically disadvantaged and minority children with exceptional talent to participate in advanced learning opportunities.

5. Preparing teachers to work with advanced materials and to use complex teaching strategies with a variety of students.

6. Ensuring that high achieving students in the USA match or exceed the performance of their counterparts anywhere in the world (pp. 27-29).

As we point out in our study, <u>National Excellence</u> sets a very

different tone from that of the Marland Report, arguing that: "To a significant degree, programs for the gifted and talented students have demonstrated for education at large what challenging curriculum and teaching strategies look like, which in turn, has shown the way for establishing higher expectations for all students" (p. 7). The theme of excellence for all students is asserted in the report's conclusion: "We must build better schools in order to create a better society. But we need better schools, too, because all children, including those with outstanding talents, deserve an education that helps each of them develop their special qualities" (p. 30).

The Marland Report proposed a new definition of giftedness and urged new approaches to the identification and nurturance of students with high abilities. Marland's definition became known as the "Office of Education definition" and had a significant influence on states with variations pervading in state legislation and regulations.

National Excellence proposes a modified Marland definition, one that focuses on talent potential, arguing that: "The term 'gifted' connotes a mature power rather than a developing ability and, therefore, is antithetic to recent research findings about children" (p. 26). The revised definition, reflecting "today's knowledge and thinking," is based on the Javits Gifted and Talented Education Act of 1988:

> Children and youth with outstanding talent perform or sow the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment.

> These children and youth exhibit high performance capability in intellectual, creative, and/or artistic areas, possess an unusual leadership capacity, or excel in specific academic fields. They require services or activities not ordinarily provided by schools.
>
> Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor (p. 26).

As we noted in our study:

> Because education is essentially a function of the states, it can be argued that one of, if not the most important, outcomes of the Marland Report was its influence and impact on the states and local school systems. The report stimulated state and local activities on an unprecedented level with policy formulations that resulted in statutory descriptions or definitions of the gifted; regulations regarding identification of such children; appointment of personnel to state education departments with briefs to initiate, coordinate, and support educational programs and services for the gifted; appropriation of state generated funds for such programs and services; and provisions for both pre- and in-service education of teachers for the gifted (p. 1).

We argued that major societal changes and school reform efforts in recent years have had a significant impact on education and schooling in general and the education of the gifted and talented. On the basis of our study, we were convinced that there was a need for states to review and reassess their policies and programs regarding the gifted in the context of these developments. The publication of the new report makes such reviews even more urgent if states and school systems are to enhance educational services for the gifted and talented.

The Need to Review and Reconsider State Policies

We believe that the major message in National Excellence is that America's schools "must provide a richer curriculum for all

students, realize each student's potential, and develop outstanding talent" (p. 29). We believe that what the DE Report does is to effectively shift the education of the gifted from separate, isolated programs and provisions to a context of developing every student's potential <u>including those with outstanding talent potential</u>.

This message does not mean, as some critics have argued, that educational provisions for the gifted should be eliminated but rather that such programs should now be designed as an integral part of the task of educating all students--i.e., nurturing the talent potential of all students, recognizing that there is a range of individual differences and that some individuals "perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment" (p. 26).

We believe that the intent of the <u>National Excellence</u> Report is to enhance and strengthen education for the gifted by placing it in the context of education for all students and thus making the identification and nurturing of talent potential an integral and central responsibility of the entire school system and the process of schooling.

This shift is a significant one, for when we consider education of the gifted in the context of education for all, it calls for a reaffirmation of state policy statements that, in effect, declare clearly and unequivocally, that the responsibility of the school system is to identify and nurture the talent

potential of all children by providing adequate and appropriate educational opportunities for all, including those with unusual potential for outstanding achievement. That is, state policy should clearly affirm or reaffirm the fact that, included in the population we speak of as "all children" there those with unusually outstanding talent potential who also require differentiated experiences and services. State policies must direct local districts to extend and intensify their search for talent potential and not to reduce or eliminate these activities.

In our study, we examined eleven specific components of legislation, regulation, and rules concerning the gifted and talented, including:

- -State mandated services
- -District plans for the gifted
- -Gifted Education as part of special education
- -Philosophy or rationale
- -Definitions of gifted and talented
- -Identification procedures
- -Programs for the gifted
- -Differentiated Curriculum and Instruction
- -Counseling and other support services
- -Program evaluation
- -State funding for the the gifted

We found considerable variability among the states and no single model that provides a pattern for other states to follow. Some state policies are clearer, more positive, and more directive than others; some are stronger with respect to specific components. We will comment on some of these elements that we believe states must review and reconsider in terms of the current climate for educational reform and the leadership and direction the federal government is providing, especially with the ongoing discussions regarding the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

Philosophy and Rationale. We found only 18 state documents that could be considered as expressing a philosophy--a conviction or a perspective about the nature of gifted children or their education. As we pointed out in our study:

> Directly or indirectly, any educational statement or action is driven by the philosophy behind it. The importance of a clear declaration of philosophy is that it lays out clearly the basis for a state's policy--the reason why such a policy needs formulating in the first place. Even if the philosophy is not overtly set forth in a state policy, it may be inferred from the type of mandate and the other program elements or components included in the policy statement. When clearly expressed, the philosophy communicates an unclouded message to educators, parents, and the community of how gifted education is viewed by policymakers (p. 18).

For example, one of the few states that has a statement titled "Philosophy of Gifted Education," Kentucky (1988) expresses its position as follows:

> All students shall be provided with an educational program which allows them to develop to their maximum potential. Gifted students possess superior abilities and/or capabilities and, therefore, are a unique segment of Kentucky's school population. In order to realize their potential, they need educational opportunities that differ from those available through the regular school program.
>
> Gifted students exist at all levels of society regardless of sex, race, socio-economic, or ethnic origin. They must be identified through their outstanding intellectual capabilities, academic aptitudes, and/or creative abilities. An articulate program shall be provided with educational experiences commensurate with their abilities. Such a program shall be conducted in an environment which will make it possible for these students to interact with others of high ability. The program shall afford students the opportunities to reach the highest level of learning and accomplishment of which they are capable at each stage of their development.

We believe that it is an "unclouded message" that becomes particularly critical. The philosophy must communicate the notion that the identification and nurturance of talent potential is

especially important when considered in the context of educating all children lest the particular educational and developmental needs of the gifted be lost in efforts that provide only for basic or uniform educational experiences. States must affirm or reaffirm a philosophy that education of the gifted and talented is especially important and necessary when education for the gifted becomes more explicitly a part of education for all.

Mandated Services. One of the more important elements of policy deals with whether programs or provisions for the gifted are mandated or discretionary. Mandated services are required services and carry with them some variations of a must directive for local school districts. In some states, the mandate takes the form of a set of standards to be met if a program or provisions are to receive funding. Discretionary programs carry a permissive may. In discretionary programs, certain standards may be recommended but not required, although discretionary funds are usually contingent upon adherence to the standards. States vary in the linkages between the state education agency (SEA) and its local districts (LEAs) and the nature of these relationships affects the strength and influence of the mandate.

In the course of our study, we concluded that the nature of mandates varied so that a state's mandating services for the gifted did not necessarily guarantee high quality or long term services. Some states that do mandate services, appropriate no funds; others support discretionary programs and do provide funding. However, it seems clear that state mandates for programming for the gifted tend

to spur local districts to at least think about addressing the needs of those students.

We believe that state policies must affirm or reaffirm a mandate requiring that appropriate and adequate services be provided by the local districts for all children and making clear that this cannot be attained by identical services for all. Differentiated experiences and services are especially necessary in the context of educating all children with their similarities and differences and the state must mandate that local districts give special attention to the gifted and talented who may be lost otherwise. In the light of the National Excellence report, state mandates must assert very clearly that, while increasing efforts to develop the talents of all students, local school districts must give special attention to the needs of those with unusual or outstanding talent potential. Put another way, state mandates must remind school districts that appropriate and adequate education for all includes the gifted and talented and that programs that ignore or eliminate that charge will fail to meet the state's and local district's goals and responsibilities.

Definitions of the Gifted. Our study of state policies found that the "Office of Education/Marland definition" figured prominently in many state definitions of giftedness with intellectual ability and academic aptitude found in the statements of 49 states. Even though there is often a gap between a state's definition of giftedness and those of local school districts--the latter being broader or narrower, depending on the linkages between

the SEA and the LEA in terms of program direction, accountability, and funding--the state definition usually sets the parameters for those of the local districts.

In response to our inquiry, several states indicated that they were in the process of adopting versions of Gardner's (1983) seven multiple intelligences, Sternberg's (1983) triarchic, and other broader conceptions of giftedness although none had found their way into state policies as yet. Some state definitions were broad or flexible enough so that these conceptions could be accommodated.

The DE Report asserts that: "Neuroscience and cognitive psychology provide us with new insights into what it means for children and youth to be outstanding talents and require us to develop a new definition of this population" (p. 26). The report contends that "the term 'gifted' connotes a mature power rather than a developing ability" and argues for a definition that focuses on talent potential. Just as the Marland Report prompted many states and local districts to broaden the definition of giftedness, the National Excellence report could and should cause SEAs and LEAs to reconsider their definitions.

Identification Procedures. A considerable body of research and literature is devoted to identification procedures, strategies and instruments. State policies tend to devote substantial attention to identification because it is an area that is usually included in the accountability of the state and local districts.

We found that policies regarding identification ranged from detailed, required standards to flexible guidelines or suggestions

to the specification of instruments that local districts may use in identifying gifted and talented students as defined by the state legislation or regulation.

We suggested that state policy regarding identification provide both flexibility and guidance:

> Guidance could come from requiring districts to think about the broad spectrum of techniques and instruments that might be used to screen for a range of potential abilities. Flexibility would encourage decisions to be made on the basis of local populations. For those districts considering newer theories of the nature of giftedness, the state's policies should enable them to use alternative approaches to the screening and selection processes (pp. 27-28).

We were concerned with identification of students from underserved populations--the economically disadvantaged, racial and ethnic minorities, the limited English proficient, and the handicapped. Coleman and Gallagher (1992) reported that 38 states include "references to culturally diverse populations, economically disadvantaged students, and disabled students" (p. 11). Although many states refer to the need for better identification of these underserved populations, relatively few do so with any specificity.

A major focus of the Javits Education of the Gifted and Talented Act of 1988 has been on better identification and nurturance of disadvantaged populations. As the DE Report points out:

> Javits grants projects seek out and provide educational programs for exceptionally talented students who are economically disadvantaged, speak limited English, or have disabilities. These programs are committed to finding and nurturing the strengths in children, providing promising students with important subject matter to study, and encouraging the habits of hard work. They demonstrate the

kind of practices that should be available for many more economically disadvantaged children (p. 23).

We believe that many Javits programs demonstrate the kind of practices that should be available for all gifted and talented children, including those who are disadvantaged.

One of the six recommendations of the National Excellence report urges schools to "expand opportunities for economically disadvantaged and minority children" (p. 28). In light of the importance of identifying this underserved pool of talent potential and the insights recently acquired concerning this population, state policies need to include more than references to the needs of these students and provide leadership and direction regarding intensifying the search for talent potential.

The DE Report urges schools to develop identification systems that seeks variety, uses many assessment measures, is free of bias, is fluid, identifies potential (i.e., "discovers talents that are not readily apparent in students, as well as those that are obvious"), and assesses motivation (p.27). These are positive suggestions for which state policies should now provide the specifics.

Programs for the Gifted. We found that as used in state legislation, "program for the gifted" has many different meanings. As we noted:

> States vary in the elements with which they choose to deal--some stressing program parts such as rationale, goals, objectives, teaching methods, and evaluation plans, while others choose to highlight grouping structures or early admission provisions. Part- or full-time classes, magnet schools, cluster grouping, resource rooms, special classes, Advanced Placement Program, International Baccalaureate,

> independent study, summer and out-of-school classes, and counseling or guidance programs are found in state legislation or regulations. Some states encourage even require accelerated programs while others permit it (p. 29).

In light of what we think research suggests are the current ill-advised condemnations of all grouping and tracking procedures, we believe that state policies should affirm the need for flexible grouping procedures that would facilitate teaching and learning. An affirmation in state policies would encourage school districts to explore appropriate grouping and organizational procedures rather than install heterogeneous grouping for all situations even when that approach is patently inappropriate. The DE Report's suggestion that students should be grouped and regrouped based on their interests and needs reiteration for those who would completely abolish grouping of any kind.

We believe that a state's policy would be enhanced if program standards were set that would guide local implementation efforts and that funding should be made contingent on meeting those standards. State policy program standards should delineate the program elements that local districts must consider in their planning, provide suggestions for optional methods for meeting those standards, and express a strong state commitment to help districts design and implement programs that are congruent with local needs. The policy should encourage local districts to plan programs consistent with newer and broader conceptions of giftedness and talent.

If we are to realize the vision for excellent schools that National Excellence suggests, one in which "all children progress

through challenging material at their own pace" (p. 29), state policies should encourage local districts to transcend the limitations of current school structures and organization such as grade levels and rigid scheduling and should specify class size limits.

Differentiated Curriculum and Instruction. Curriculum and instruction are, of course, at the heart of providing adequately for gifted and talented. Yet, our impression is that, despite the fact that many state policies refer to, advocate, or even mandate that local districts provide "differentiated curriculum" or "appropriate curriculum" for the gifted, there is little indication of what is meant or required and the crucial areas of curriculum and instruction are the most problematic for states and local districts.

We found that state policies tend to be more general than detailed; often interchange the terms program, curriculum, and instruction; rarely deal with components of curriculum such as goals and objectives, content, instructional strategies, pacing or program outcomes; provide little guidance in the way of standards; and seldom go beyond advocating that curriculum for the gifted be differentiated from the regular curriculum. We pointed out that state policies "tend not to deal adequately with the issues concerning the subjects to be studied, the courses to be taken, the standards or attainment levels that must be realized, the scope and sequence to be followed, or the curricular balance that should be provided" (p. 42).

With respect to curriculum, the DE Report makes a number of important assertions, including these about the elementary and middle schools:

> The vast majority of talented students spend most of the school day in a regular classroom where little is done to adapt curriculum to their special learning needs. Exciting pedagogy and teaching strategies have been developed and refined in some special programs for gifted and talented...Programs for gifted and talented students have served as laboratories of innovation in educational practice. However, few of these approaches have made their way into the regular classroom (p. 19).
>
> All children, not just those with exceptional talent, have suffered from a narrowing of the curriculum; but the gap between the level of the curriculum and the abilities of talented students is the largest of all student groups (p. 19).
>
> Classroom teachers do little to accommodate the different learning needs of gifted children....most teachers said they give the same assignments to both gifted and average students almost all the time, and few said they use many "higher level" teaching strategies in the classroom" (p. 20).
>
> While programs for gifted students often provide challenging learning opportunities, most students with outstanding talent spend most of their time in the regular curriculum with few differentiated opportunities (p. 20).
>
> A few districts provide intense or accelerated arts instruction in magnet schools designed for elementary and middle students, but such opportunities are not widely available throughout the country (p. 20).

Two of the DE Report's six recommendations deal with curriculum and instruction:

> **Establish challenging curriculum standards.** The nation must establish performance standards in the core subjects that challenge students performing at the highest levels....
>
> **Establish high-level learning opportunities.** The nation must establish comprehensive and advanced learning opportunities that meet the needs of children with outstanding talents in every school in the nation....

Transforming State Policies to Better Develop the Nation's Talent

We believe that the National Excellence report poses an important challenge to states agencies. This challenge is to exercise their leadership responsibilities in creating the kinds of policies that will move local school districts to provide appropriate and adequate curriculum and learning opportunities that motivate all children to perform "on the boundary of individual ability in ways that test and push back personal limits" (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 12).

It is not easy to get beyond the rhetoric of school reform. The National Excellence report provides "a vision for excellent schools" in which everyone wins:

> All students have an equal opportunity to develop their talents and to display exceptional talent in educational settings that require sophisticated thinking and a high level of performance. All teachers search for the strengths and talents of their pupil;s and interests, and nurture those talents. Exceptional students pursue intensively their special talent, allowing the nation to grow intellectually, culturally, and economically stronger (p. 29).

Schools that fulfill this vision are not readily realized unless states perform the leadership roles that only they can provide. We believe what is needed is the review of all policies that impact on the learning experiences provided all youngsters, including those who are gifted and talented. At a minimum, state's should:

* Affirm or reaffirm a philosophy that clearly states the belief that the identification and nurture of outstanding talent potential are an integral part of the school's responsibility for the talent development of all children.

* Develop curricular and instructional standards that focus on both cognitive and affective development and that are "sufficiently high to challenge talented students".
* Provide guidance to local districts to develop learning opportunities "as diverse as the talents of the children"--opportunities that differentiate in terms of tempo or pace, depth and breadth, nature and kind of learning.
* Support pre-service and in-service staff development that will nurture the knowledge, insights, and understandings of teachers to apply teaching strategies and create learning communities that will differentiate curriculum and instruction meaningfully.
* Encourage and facilitate parents' active and substantial involvement in their children's education.
* Utilize the diverse human and material resources of the community to extending and enrich learning opportunities, ensuring "that community and school resources are matched with students' strengths and needs" (p. 29).
* Set standards for evaluation and assessment to create systems of accountability that will ensure that local school districts are meeting the needs of all children, including those with outstanding talent potential.
* Recognize that creation of schools that focus on talent development require adequate funding and provide it.

Most state policies were triggered by the Marland Report. National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent

recognizes that: "Much has changed since that report alerted Americans to the pressing needs of [gifted and talented] youngsters and challenged policymakers to provide them with a better education" (p. iii). We believe that state and local educational agencies need to take the message of National Excellence as seriously as that of the Marland Report and undertake a thorough and complete review of their policies regarding the development of America's talent along the lines we have suggested.

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